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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000892

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AF/C, AF/SPG, AF/SE WILLIAMSON, NSC
FOR BPITTMAN AND CHUDSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/15/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL PREF PHUM SU

SUBJECT: CHADIAN REBELS DISCUSS LATEST OFFENSIVE

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, Reason: Section 1.4 (b) and (d)
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¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On June 15 at 13:00, representatives of the National Alliance (NA) told poloffs that contrary to other reports, Chadian rebels control Goz Beida and are on the verge of entering Abeche. NA representatives requested U.S. mediation in the conflict, stating that they are ready to stop fighting as soon as talks with the GoC begin. END SUMMARY

CURRENT STATE OF THE ATTACK

¶2. (C) On June 15, polcouns and poloff met United Force for Democracy and Development (UFDD) representative Abaker Tolli and Mukhtar Yaya, the official spokesman of UFDD-Fondamentale and representative of Abdelwahid Aboud. Tolli and Yaya stated that the NA, along with Hasballah's UFCD, are in "complete control" of Goz Beida. Yaya stated that Mahamat Nouri is the accepted leader of this united force. They stated that the rebel forces were divided into three columns, one positioned in Goz Beida with 200 vehicles, the other in between Am Dam and Goz Beida (near Biere Am Gena and Zafai) with at least 100 vehicles, and the third on the outskirts of Abeche with at least another 100 vehicles. Yaya stated that the force had downed two GoC helicopters outside of Dar Silla, and that they were waiting to see how the GoC "would use its other two helicopters." They reported that GoC troops are defecting to the rebel forces "by the group." According to these representatives Nouri, Aboud, and Soubiane are in the field at an undisclosed location. RFC leader Timane Erdimi has yet to join the AN in this latest offensive, but the AN is in discussions with Erdimi. Tolli and Yaya said that there had not been any direct military engagement with EUFOR troops, as EUFOR was staying safely in their bunkers. Likewise, Yaya stated that there has been no fighting between the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the NA forces.

LOOKING AHEAD

¶3. (C) Yaya stated that the NA has prepared press statements that they will soon distribute detailing the progress of their attack. Tolli stated that the Government of Sudan has not been involved in the attack, but additionally has not done anything to rein in the NA, "as we have our military base in Chad, not Sudan." Yaya stated that the strategy for the NA, is a "step by step" attack to the capital. "We will hold the territory that we have gained and fight back any attempt to regain it," said Yaya. He added that he was not concerned about the impending rainy season which could slow their attack, as "we've already made it to the door of Abeche and from there, their path is much easier." Yaya added that the Government "with their tanks and heavy equipment will suffer more in the rain than the light and mobile forces of the NA." Yaya stated that they are not intimidated by the GoC's new defenses around Abeche,

saying, "even if there is a moat or a ditch around Ndjamena, we know the city and can enter it from many different ways. We were born there, and unlike the JEM forces which tried to invade Khartoum, we know our capital."

"WE WANT NEGOTIATIONS"

14. (C) Yaya and Tolli repeatedly emphasized that they are ready for negotiations and seek U.S. mediation. They stated that they have had no substantial contact with the GoC since Sirte. Tolli stated that they do not have any preconditions for negotiations and are flexible as to the venue, though they prefer Addis Ababa or Abuja. Tolli added that they are in touch of Timane Erdimi (who they reported was in Sudan near Kulbus in West Darfur) and that his negotiations with the GoC were a "complete failure." "We are ready for talks even if we make it all the way to the gates of Ndjamena," stated Nouri. Tolli added that although the NA wants peace, there is no other option except war at this point, as other countries in the region develop and the people of Chad continue to suffer in poverty. Tolli stated that the NA has had little contact with the French, and that it sees U.S. involvement as the best opportunity at bringing peace to Chad. Polcouns stated that NA representatives need to initiate direct contact with the GoC and President Deby to press for negotiations.

15. Upon departing, Tolli stated that he would soon be traveling to the field and that Mukhtar Yaya remains the official representative of the NA in Khartoum.

COMMENT

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16. (C) It was apparent that Yaya and Tolli clearly hoped for further U.S. interaction with the NA and appeared disappointed that the US has not engaged more fully. Yaya, in particular, appeared frustrated at poloff's follow up questions and overall skepticism regarding many of the alleged NA victories. Certainly their claims of the size of the current rebel force seems exaggerated and as unlikely as their ridiculous disavowal of Khartoum's overt support and patronage. The rebel representatives' eagerness to negotiate may also signal that their military campaign may have not been as successful as they reported in this June 15 meeting, especially given other accounts reporting GoC victories in Goz Beida and eastern Chad. While we will continue to meet with Yaya and other NA representatives in Khartoum, we will take everything they say with a large degree of suspicion.

FERNANDEZ